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Following is the last address by Robert C. McFarlane as Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, before the World Affairs Council of Washington, D.C., December 9, 1985.

I welcome the opportunity to speak to the Washington World Affairs Council this evening. I accepted your invitation, at the time as a public official, out of a firm conviction regarding the vital contribution that is made to shaping public policy by outside centers of analysis and debate. You may be still more confident today of my ever stronger belief that the government should be always attentive to the enlightened views of those of us in the private sector.

I have a second reason for valuing the chance to speak to you. We are at a historic moment of opportunity and risk in American foreign policy, particularly regarding East-West relations. It is important that we understand where we are, how we reached the current plateau, and the alternative paths before us. In this way we can, with vision and care, seize the opportunities at hand, create the ones that have not yet matured, and avoid the pitfalls of naivete.

Last week, in making my departure from the President's staff, I observed that numerous philosophers throughout history have argued the weaknesses of democracy. The harsher critics have asserted that democracies are fragile, fated first to decline, and ultimately to disintegrate. Even some of the less severe analysts have written that democratic nations have inherent failings in the conduct of foreign policy.

I said then, and again now, that America's extraordinary renewal over the past 5 years is a historic phenomenon that such pessimistic political theorists will have to acknowledge as important evidence of their error. Our nation has rallied, soberly but with clear-eyed determination. The President and the American people share the credit. I'll return to the details of this achievement in a moment—I think it amounts to far more than a change in mood—but first let me give the pessimists their due.

There have, remember, been other moments of buoyancy in our history and other times when our foreign policy seemed even more blessed than today. There have, in fact, been at least two in my lifetime. Forty years ago, Americans hoped that in the wake of war a world order could be created that was freer of conflict than during the preceding generation of tumult. Others, it was hoped, would take their cue from our nation's prosperous example and from the self-evident advantages of our political system.

A little more than 20 years ago marked another national high. The surging economies of the Western world seemed likely to solve many global problems through the impact of steady growth. There was no euphoria about East-West relations then, but the tensions of cold war had certainly subsided. It seemed that perhaps Soviet-American relations were not an area of such intractable difficulty after all.

From both these peaks of opportunity and confidence, we descended for a time into disappointment. In 1945, we launched into peace, thinking that would be easy compared to what was already behind us. In 1965, we launched into war, and many people thought *that* would be easy. Both turned out to be a lot harder than we expected, and, in fact, naivete and inconstancy of this kind are central to the indictments against the foreign policy skills of democracies—naivete to start with, followed by disappointment and confusion, followed by despair.

After reflection on this history, what can we say about what lies ahead? Who can say that America's mood won't unravel, that we have carefully thought through the huge tasks before us and that we have the resources, material and spiritual, to perform them?

Well, tonight *I* will. I want to argue that this Administration's success is not a transitory anomaly on a path of inevitable decline. The effort we're making is sustainable, the achievements of the past few years are solid, the strategy for the next few years is sound. But—in democracies there's always a "but"—nothing could be more dangerous than complacency. The tasks before us *are* huge, and, from leaders and citizens

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alike, we will need unusual clear-headedness and commitment.

Nothing makes clearer America's ability to sustain a leading role in international affairs than the results already achieved.

Recall where our nation stood just 5 years ago. In the late 1970s we seemed to be in a state of decline on almost every front. The economy was chaotic, suffering inflation and stagnation at the same time—something the economists had told us was impossible. Confidence in our political system had been shaken by assassination, by the trauma of a president resigning from office, by weak leadership, by conflict and stalemate between the branches of government. This coincided with a half decade or so in which the defense budget was flat or falling. We had lost a war. We saw many of our politicians and pundits tempted by isolationism and many of our allies unsure of our pledges to them.

Concurrently, Soviet power and willingness to take risks rose dramatically. Despite arms control agreements designed to create nuclear stability, the Soviet Union steamed steadily ahead in acquiring new strategic nuclear forces. And despite the conclusion of many academic writers that force had become irrelevant in international politics, the Soviets showed they thought quite differently. We witnessed increased Soviet involvements, both direct and indirect, both close to home and far away.

When this trend culminated in the invasion of Afghanistan, suddenly Western worries boiled over. But worry was one thing, national strategy was another. What were we to do?

Restoring U.S. Strength

President Reagan came into office determined to reverse this decline. To do so meant understanding how pervasive it had become. We had to restore not only our military power—the foundation of deterrence—but also our moral, political, and economic strength and, in the process, our sense of purpose and our self-confidence. Through 5 years of steady rebuilding, he has accomplished just that. You all know the dimensions of the economic recovery, but it has also provided the underpinning for a revival in foreign policy that has been just as impressive.

Critics have said that in foreign policy the Reagan Administration does just what it rejects in domestic policy: throw money at problems and, above all, defense dollars. This reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of what has happened over the past 5 years. For the rebuilding of our military strength, however important, is not the sole source of President Reagan's foreign policy success.

Our defense budget could not have counted for half so much had the President not also been committed to restoring our reputation for reliability, to showing steadiness under pressure, to expressing our devotion to democratic principle, to developing imaginative long-term approaches even though results wouldn't be seen immediately, and finally to mustering energy and shortening our response time when quick results were essential.

This surely sounds like a long list of self-plaudits, so let me give you some specific examples.

By reliability, I mean that when Pakistan comes under increased pressure from cross-border bombing attacks, the United States responds with a solid long-term program of political and military support.

By steadiness, I mean a 3-year balanced strategy on the issue of intermediate-range missiles in Europe, exploring every possible avenue for a negotiated solution but not letting the Soviets bully NATO into backing down.

By democratic principle, I have in mind bolstering El Salvador's best hope for a humane future, even though many in our country have called Central American Leninist revolutions inevitable.

By imagination, I mean the careful combination of private and official efforts in Secretary Baker's strategy for coping with LDC [less developed country] debt. I might just as easily refer to the ground-breaking proposals for a Middle East peace embodied in the Reagan plan, which is still the most promising approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Finally, by energy and quick reaction time, I am thinking of Ethiopian famine relief and of the Grenada rescue operation.

The achievements I've described here are important in themselves. But they are also the firm anchor for other efforts, in particular, for one of the most hopeful possibilities in years—the prospect of more stable and, in time, maybe even more constructive East-West relations.

Building More Constructive East-West Relations

You have all heard a great deal about the President's meetings last month with General Secretary Gorbachev. Let me add one piece to the story that has not always received enough attention. What he achieved in Geneva last month would simply not have been possible without the firm foundation of his foreign policy as a whole, put in place over the last 5 years. There are new opportunities before us now not because the President is changing his approach but precisely because he *isn't* changing it.

Those who want further progress between Washington and Moscow—and that should include all of us—need to understand that this is what it takes: realism, patience, and determination. Otherwise, the hopes that have been raised will be quickly dashed.

I have said that President Reagan came into office recognizing that more than a military buildup was needed to prevent a permanent American decline. His strategy for dealing with the Soviet Union has had the same breadth. In one of his most important speeches on this subject, in January 1984, he set out three objectives that continue to govern the Administration's approach.

- The first was to do everything possible to reduce the danger of nuclear war. He has said this many times: whatever our differences, and whether or not they can be resolved, they should stay peaceful. It is essential that both sides design their military forces, and negotiate arms reduction agreements, with this goal in mind.
- Second, he spoke of the need to deal with a disturbing pattern in the Soviet Union's international conduct—the use, promotion, or exploitation of force and subversion to extend its influence beyond its borders. This pattern of conduct was as important as anything else in shattering the prospects for mutually beneficial relations in the postwar period.
- Finally, the President said that he hoped to construct what he called a better "working relationship" between the two sides.

These three goals express the deep realism on which the Reagan revival has been based. It is a realism that

recognizes what sometimes seem like conflicting truths:

- *Both* that few things could contribute more to peace than real internal change in the Soviet Union, *and* that it can't be our job to bring that change about; it's the Soviets' job.
- *Both* that our most profound differences cannot be resolved, *and* that they must remain peaceful.
- *Both* that nuclear weapons aren't the source of Soviet-American disagreement, *and* that they're the part of the conflict we must try hardest to control.
- *Both* that Moscow does not invent all the world's ills, *and* that more responsible Soviet behavior in the Third World is essential if the world's new nations are to have a chance of peace, freedom, and progress.

These have been—and, I am sure, will remain—the Administration's goals and principles. I think that the meeting in Geneva made clear that they're exactly the right ones. It is true that in managing the affairs of a great nation, you get only so much credit for having the right goals and principles. Now that we're already anticipating another summit, are we, in fact, moving any closer to concrete results? And if we aren't, what other steps are we taking to do so?

Reducing the Danger of Nuclear War. Over the past several years, no issue has been the subject of more inflamed political debate than nuclear weapons: what kind we should have, how many, where, at what price, and then, if possible, how to get rid of them. For a time, in fact, the Soviet Union seemed to want to make a whole foreign policy out of inflammatory rhetoric on this question.

President Reagan has had a different approach. He has pursued the most practical of negotiating approaches—to focus first on the most dangerous weapons, ballistic missiles—while concurrently exploring ways in which the nuclear danger could be radically reduced in the future. That's reflected in his call for a 50% reduction in ballistic missile warheads. That's why we've put forward a series of flexible formulas for limiting the number of intermediate-range missiles in Europe, and so forth. But it's also why the President is committed to the research program of the Strategic Defense Initiative.

Over the past 5 years, we have found precious little agreement with the Soviet side in discussing these issues. That was perhaps inevitable. Was it not to be expected that given the trends of the late 1970s they would wait us out for 4 years? Indeed, the wait may not be over. Since the Geneva talks, we have heard a lot of familiar talk from the Soviet side—raising objections to American decisions that haven't even been taken and can't even be considered for years, objections to weapons that aren't weapons at all, and objections to aggressive intentions that simply don't exist.

And yet what happened at Geneva was not simply an articulate and forceful repetition of old positions on each side. We also arrived at a document at the end, and its language may prove to be a small glimmer of daylight in this process. In the joint statement issued by the two leaders after 15 hours of discussion, they agreed that their negotiating teams should accelerate efforts for progress. President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev said they wanted—and here I quote—"early progress, in particular in areas where there is common ground."

The meaning of that phrase, "common ground," should be perfectly clear. It refers to those issues on which the long spadework of the past has paid off, above all to our agreement that there should be 50% reductions, appropriately applied, in offensive strategic nuclear weapons. It refers to the possibility of an interim agreement on INF [intermediate-range nuclear forces]. The leaders' joint statement explicitly identified both these issues.

Now the mere fact that the Soviets agreed to this language on reductions represents a fundamental change from the days of March 1977 or even of January 1981. No one should pretend it's the millennium. But it does identify the way in which a breakthrough just might be made in the future: by concluding agreements on those issues where we do have a meeting of the minds and continuing to work on other issues where disagreements obviously remain.

Churchill had a phrase for such a moment. After the battle of El Alamein, he said that it wasn't the beginning of the end but the end of the beginning. It may be, of course, that the Soviets will not live up to the words of the joint statement. A cautious man might have to predict that this is what will happen. But it may be that, ever so slowly, the ground is starting to move.

One of the tell-tale signs that movement is underway in any negotiation (particularly on a subject as complex as on nuclear weapons) is that some issues begin to be eased off the agenda. The two sides stop talking about theory and start talking about details. If we're approaching such a moment, the next round of talks in Geneva should tell us a lot.

Dealing With Soviet Involvement in Regional Conflicts. Of course, the Soviet weapons that are going off in the world today are not nuclear missiles but mortars and land mines. And the men, women, and children that these weapons are killing are Afghans; they're followers of Jonas Savimbi in Angola; they're the brave Khmers who won't accept the crushing of Cambodian national independence. And they're the innocent victims of Libyan-sponsored terrorism. They include Major Arthur Nicholson.

That's why President Reagan said so often before the summit that he was determined to raise the issue of Soviet global conduct that troubles us and threatens peace. That's why at the United Nations he proposed a formula for resolving a series of dangerous regional conflicts. A thoroughgoing change in Soviet-American relations has to mean a change on issues like these, too.

Unfortunately, there are very few signs of such change. All of us present at the meetings in Geneva heard a businesslike, reasonable-sounding tone on the subject of Afghanistan. Since then, however, General Secretary Gorbachev has spoken again on the subject. What he told the Supreme Soviet on November 27 left little room for encouragement. It was, point for point, the established Soviet position, maintained over 6 years of occupation. That is, the United States is the problem, and the *mujahidin* resistance is simply "counterrevolutionary gangs" hired from the outside.

This is discouraging. But when we continue to raise such problems anyway, it is not out of sheer stubbornness. It is because in the end we believe there is a kind of common Soviet-American interest that can and should be strengthened.

Everyone knows that the chronic instability of much of the Third World provides recurrent opportunities for Soviet involvement. But, in point of fact, such involvements simply will not bring substantial benefit to the Soviet Union. They will not, because in practice they will not be allowed to. Too many other states have too large a stake in preventing it. And working together, they can succeed.

Helping others to protect themselves requires that we spend the very scarce resources of the Federal budget, but few dollars are better spent than on security assistance. Few dollars contribute more in the end to our own defense. This is a point that Soviet con-

duct has helped to make for us over the past several years. Nothing, I might also add, has done more than Soviet conduct, or than 25 years of experience with socialism, to reopen a dialogue between the United States and states of the Third World who for years seemed to speak an utterly different ideological language.

It is clear that if the Soviets persist in seeking to expand their influence by military action and subversion, then over the long run the outstanding result will be an increased risk of military confrontation. This problem has to be addressed. In keeping it a live part of Soviet-American discussions on the Third World, our goal is not to pull the superpowers in more deeply. It is to find the practical means of disengagement, at least in military terms.

If we succeed, let me point out how large the benefits could be—for us, for Moscow, for states of many of these unsettled regions. As the destiny of South Africa, to take an important example, is played out over the next few years, it will be far easier for the United States to play the kind of economic role that many black African states would like if we do not have to worry at the same time about a growing Soviet-bloc army in Angola.

Constructing a Better Working Relationship. Finally, where do we stand in meeting the President's third goal—a better working relationship with the Soviet Union? Certainly there is a faster pace, more points of contact between our societies, and many more channels of communication. But I think there is perhaps no better answer to the question than what anyone could see of the summit itself. It certainly looked as though two strong leaders were laying the basis for very practical dealings with each other in the future. General Secretary Gorbachev, you'll recall, came into the summit saying that U.S.-Soviet relations were at their lowest point ever. And he came out telling a press conference that as a result of the meeting the world had become a "more secure place."

We don't have to take either of his statements too literally. But we should see in them a recognition, which the Soviet leadership did not have just a year or two ago, that the West will not be knocked off course by threats. That was the lesson of Geneva, and it's a lesson well-learned. If the Soviet leaders have decided there's no alternative to doing business in a sober, serious way, then the world *has*, in fact, become a safer place. And a working relationship can then begin to do what it should do—work.

Overcoming Illusions

I have referred throughout these remarks to the kinds of choices that will face Americans, and the citizens of the other democracies, in the future. The choice is, above all, whether to see our renewal through, whether to stick with the policies that can bring us results both at home and abroad. The progress we have already made may seem easy to sustain, but, of course, it will not be easy. In contrast to those peaks of confidence, that I mentioned earlier, 20 and 40 years ago, we face the opportunities of the present under the constraint of tight budgets, under public pressure for early results, but also—let us pray this is true—under no illusions.

At home and abroad, the achievement of the Reagan Administration, in which it has been an honor for me to serve, could perhaps be put this way: overcoming illusions, so as to rediscover the real basis of hope.

We have tried to overcome the illusion that the great goals of our nation can be easily or quickly achieved. But we have also tried to show that real effort can begin to create a world in which those goals of peace and freedom are not just slogans or mirages but truly within our grasp. This is the wisdom on which our nation was founded; it is the message we have for the world; it is the realism that allows us to attain our ideals. ■

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